

Enclosure

EPA and NOAA's Assessment of Oregon's Implementation-Ready TMDL Approach and the State's Progress in Addressing the Remaining Conditions on its Coastal Nonpoint Pollution Control Program

1) Will the Implementation of the Implementation-Ready TMDLs, in the Mid-Coast Basin, Likely Result in Actions to Achieve and Maintain Water Quality Standards (WQS)?

ODEQ has not begun to evaluate the safe-harbor Best Management Practices (BMPs) needed to achieve and maintain water quality standards. Absent these BMPs and a completed Mid-Coast IR-TMDL document, EPA and NOAA cannot determine if the IR-TMDL approach is likely to result in actions that achieve and maintain WQS. However, based on the progress that has been made, we are concerned that the IR-TMDL approach would not enable the state to achieve and maintain water quality standards.

Although ODEQ has fallen short of identifying specific BMPs and completing the Mid-Coast IR-TMDL document, it has made good progress in establishing the geographic scope of the sediment IR-TMDL document and the water quality targets for the TMDLs to address turbidity and biocriteria listings. To determine the scope of sediment problems in the Mid-Coast Basin, ODEQ used PREDATOR and Stressor ID methodology to assess the biocriteria impairments caused by sediment. ODEQ then determined percent fine sediment targets associated with the biological impairments to set sediment water quality targets for biocriteria listings. EPA and NOAA believe this methodology is credible and establishes an important link between aquatic life use and water quality.

However, ODEQ still needs to develop mandatory and enforceable BMPs for the Mid-Coast IR-TMDLs that, when implemented, would result in attainment of applicable WQS. If ODEQ chooses to allow the Designated Management Agencies (DMAs) to develop the BMPs, then ODEQ needs to determine whether the BMPs submitted by the DMAs are adequate and, if not, to require additional BMPs if DMA actions alone are not adequate to meet applicable WQS. The process ODEQ would use to make this assessment and require additional BMPs is not clear yet. In addition, it is not clear if the DMA developed BMPs would be incorporated into the TMDL document. If the BMPs are not part of the TMDL document, then the TMDLs would be more representative of traditional TMDLs, rather than IR-TMDLs and would likely not enable Oregon to satisfy its Coastal Nonpoint Program condition.

2) Will Oregon's Plan Developing Implementation-Ready TMDLs throughout the Coastal Nonpoint Program Management Area Satisfy the Outstanding Additional Management Measure for Forestry Condition on the State's Coastal Nonpoint Program?

Based on what EPA and NOAA have been presented to date, we do not believe the current IR-TMDL approach is likely to satisfy the outstanding additional management measures for forestry condition. The 1997 conditional approval findings for Oregon's Coastal Nonpoint

Program noted weaknesses in the state's ability to adequately address impacts from forest roads, as well as protect riparian and landslide prone areas, among other issues.

Although a conceptual forest road strategy that ODEQ discussed with EPA has good potential, to date, ODEQ has not provided a required road strategy that is sufficiently specific. Key elements of a viable forest road strategy that could address outstanding concerns include, but are not limited to:

- development of an inventory/assessment to identify where impacts from forest roads exist;
- development of a reasonable timeline for fixing forest roads which have water quality impacts;
- development of a requirement to track and report on progress made to fix identified forest road problems. Implementation principles for the tracking program would include addressing the worst road problems or highest risk categories of road problems earlier in the overall timeline as well as milestone-based targets to ensure steady progress on identified road work; and
- identification of effective BMPs for road siting, construction, operation, maintenance, abandoning, and closing to ensure road stability, drainage of road runoff back to the forest floor rather than directly to streams and other waterbodies, and adequate protection of both fish and nonfish bearing streams. This could include establishing targets for the maximum percentage of a road network allowed to discharge directly to streams and other waterbodies, or other similar targets. This identification also should include periodic monitoring or inspections to track BMP implementation, determine if targets are being met, assess BMP effectiveness, and the need to adjust BMPs in the future.

EPA and NOAA are also concerned about Oregon's lack of progress identifying additional management measures for the protection of riparian and landslide prone areas. Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) is not considering requirements for the protection of riparian areas around nonfish bearing streams in its current riparian rulemaking effort. It is not clear that ODF will have developed adequate requirements for the protection of riparian areas around small and medium fish bearing streams through the ODF rulemaking process by the time EPA and NOAA must make a final decision on the adequacy of Oregon's Coastal Nonpoint Program.

In addition, ODEQ has not developed additional management measures for small and medium fish bearing streams or nonfish bearing streams in the IR-TMDL effort. There is a significant body of science to support increased protection of riparian areas around small and medium streams in Oregon. Increased no-cut buffers, higher tree retention targets, minimum canopy retention targets, and/or higher basal area targets are currently required on private forest land, for similar forest types in the two adjacent coastal states.

There are many practices that, in combination, would help Oregon meet the additional management measures for forestry condition by protecting riparian areas, reducing sediment loads, and addressing large wood and stream temperature issues, including: buffering key segments of nonfish bearing streams that affect downstream water quality above confluences

of nonfish bearing streams and fish bearing streams; buffering hollows, inner gorges, headwalls, unstable landforms, and stream initiation points; and buffering special aquatic sites such as seeps, springs, wetlands, and beaver ponds. NOAA and EPA recommend that Oregon consider riparian protection approaches similar to those that have addressed Coastal Nonpoint Program requirements in neighboring coastal states.

Oregon has not yet provided sufficient information regarding additional management measures for landslide prone areas. ODF already requires management measures for protection of landslide prone areas that pose a risk to humans. A similar approach could be applied on high risk landslide prone areas to protect water quality and fisheries. Oregon could also consider adopting requirements similar to Washington Forests and Fish rule provisions for protection of landslide prone areas.

A viable program for the protection of Oregon's landslide prone areas would include a process for identifying and designating high risk landslide prone areas. Factors such as slope and landform, sediment and wood delivery potential, and geologic factors should be used in the designation. Landscape scale mapping and analysis tools (e.g., LiDAR and DEMs) could help focus risk identification and designation efforts. An array of BMPs, including no harvest and thinning at various levels to maintain root strength and reduce precipitation impacts on soils, could be required in high risk areas based on factors such as delivery potential, the sensitivity of the aquatic resources, existing instream conditions, or other parameters. Oregon also may wish to consider an option to provide flexibility for forest land owners to utilize certified geologists or engineers to develop BMP options that provide equal or greater protection than the more broadly required measures. The program Oregon develops to address landslide prone areas must provide adequate protection for both fish and nonfish bearing streams.

3) *Feedback on the State's Progress in Meeting the New Development Condition on its Coastal Nonpoint Program*

To address its remaining condition for new development, ODEQ has proposed to:

- develop guidance, consistent with the new development 6217 (g) management measure, for TMDL Implementation Plan development for urban and rural residential areas within the Coastal Nonpoint Program management area boundary; and
- provide a strategy and schedule for completing and updating TMDL Implementation Plans to be consistent with that new guidance.

In its July 21, 2010 letter to EPA and NOAA, ODEQ committed to completing a final draft of the guidance by December 31, 2010, releasing the final guidance by June 30, 2011, and beginning to hold workshops for DMAs by June/July 2011. However, ODEQ has yet to finalize the guidance and a "final" draft of *Guidance for TMDL Implementation Plan Development for Urban/Rural Residential Land Uses within the Coastal Nonpoint Management Area* (Implementation Guidance) that EPA and NOAA reviewed and commented on in July 2012 still needed significant work.

While EPA and NOAA have been supportive of the potential for this approach to address the new development management measure requirements, we are very concerned that the deadlines have slipped significantly. In addition, based on our review of the July 2012 “final” draft guidance, it is still unclear whether the TMDL Implementation Plans developed under this guidance need to include practices consistent with the 6217(g) management measure for new development and whether ODEQ has the authority to require implementation of the new development management measure, as needed (see comments EPA and NOAA provided to ODEQ by email on July 23, 2012). This gives us concern that this TMDL Implementation Plan Guidance for urban areas may not enable Oregon to satisfy its new development condition.

As ODEQ finalizes this guidance, it needs to make sure the guidance provides unambiguous instruction to the DMAs that practices consistent with the new development management measure need to be incorporated into their TMDL Implementation Plans [i.e., practices that will reduce post-development total suspended solid (TSS) loadings by 80% or reduce TSS loadings so that the average annual TSS loads are no greater than predevelopment loadings, and maintain post-development peak runoff rate and average volume to pre-development levels]. The guidance also needs to clearly indicate that ODEQ can ensure implementation of the new development management measure, as needed.

It was our understanding that the Implementation Guidance would require Urban DMAs to include practices consistent with the new development measure within their TMDL Implementation Plans or, at a minimum, that ODEQ would have the ability to require implementation of the recommended new development management measure. While states can use voluntary approaches, backed by enforceable authorities, to meet their Coastal Nonpoint Program requirements (see the EPA NOAA 1998 *Final Administrative Changes Memo*), statements in Oregon’s July 2012 “final” draft appear to contradict Oregon’s September 23, 2005, legal opinion asserting that ODEQ does have authority to require implementation of the 6217(g) measures as necessary to control nonpoint source pollution. We urge ODEQ to resolve this apparent discrepancy.

EPA and NOAA hope ODEQ will expeditiously complete the *Guidance for TMDL Implementation Plan Development for Urban/Rural Residential Land Uses within the Coastal Nonpoint Management Area* and ensure that it clearly states that Urban DMAs need to include practices consistent with the new development measure and that ODEQ has the ability to ensure implementation of these practices, as needed. We strongly encourage ODEQ to share a revised final draft of the guidance with EPA and NOAA for review as soon as possible so we can confirm that these requirements are met or provide recommendations for how the draft can be improved further.

4) *Feedback on the Oregon’s Progress in Meeting the Onsite Sewage Disposal System (OSDS) Condition on its Coastal Nonpoint Program*

To address its remaining condition for OSDS, ODEQ has proposed to develop rules to require point of sale inspections for systems within the Coastal Nonpoint Program management area. EPA and NOAA applaud Oregon’s progress on rule development and the fact that it was on target for meeting benchmarks in its July 21, 2010 commitment letter. The

proposed rules require all OSDSs within the Coastal Nonpoint Program management area to be inspected by a professional engineer, registered environmental health specialist, wastewater specialist or certified inspector at the time of property transfer and that the results of the inspection be reported to ODEQ. The state has also provided a sample inspection form that provides a detailed examination of the system beyond a simple visual inspection. The proposed rules requiring point of sale inspections and reliance on qualified inspectors, combined with the state's detailed inspection form, should enable the state to satisfy its OSDS condition when adopted.

EPA and NOAA are aware that ODEQ has decided to delay presenting the proposed rules to the Oregon Environmental Quality Commission (EQC) for adoption until March 2013 to give ODEQ more time to discuss the proposed rules with several state legislatures. We recognize some additional time may be needed to address potential concerns. However, we strongly hope that the adoption of the proposed rules will not be delayed beyond March 2013. In addition, EPA and NOAA expect ODEQ to ensure that significant changes to the proposed rules do not occur such that the rules would no longer enable Oregon to satisfy its remaining OSDS condition.

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